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# News Release

## **United States and Canada announce results of Operation Frozen Timber, a multi-agency probe targeting cross-border aerial drug smuggling** *Organizations used helicopters to ferry tons of drugs to backwoods drop sites*

BELLINGHAM, Wash. – Calling it one of the most brazen criminal schemes ever uncovered along the U.S.-Canada border, authorities from the two countries today unveiled the results of a multi-agency operation targeting a network of smuggling organizations that used aircraft to ferry tons of drugs across the border, dropping many of the loads in broad daylight at remote wooded locations in Washington and British Columbia.

At a news conference here this morning, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Julie Myers, United States Attorney John McKay, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Chief Superintendent Bud Mercer outlined details of a nearly two-year ICE-led enforcement effort called Operation Frozen Timber. ICE and the RCMP worked closely with agencies from both nations on the Operation, including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the National Parks Service, the Washington State Patrol, the United States Attorney's Offices in Seattle and Spokane, the DEA, the FBI, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Sheriff's Departments of Whatcom, Skagit, and Okanogan Counties, and the Abbotsford Police Department.

Since the investigation began in November 2004, the United States Attorneys' Offices in Seattle and Spokane have issued 45 indictments in connection with the case, resulting in more than 40 arrests so far. In Canada, the RCMP has made six related arrests. In total, U.S. and Canadian authorities have seized roughly 8,000 pounds of marijuana, 800 pounds of cocaine, three aircraft, and \$1.5 million in U.S. currency.

"These organized criminal groups are motivated by one thing: greed," said John McKay, United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington. "With Operation Frozen Timber, we not only cut into their profits with countless seizures of drugs and money, we demonstrated that there is a high price to pay. Drug ring leader Robert Kesling now knows that high price – he is doing 17 years in federal prison."

Authorities say the British Columbia-based smuggling organizations targeted in Operation Frozen Timber used helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to transport drug loads to pre-arranged drop sites on public lands throughout the region, including locations in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and

Okanogan National Forests, and North Cascades National Park. The network smuggled high-grade Canadian grown marijuana into the United States and cocaine into Canada.

At today's news conference, authorities played dramatic surveillance footage taken during the investigation. One clip shows 350-pound loads of suspected high-grade, Canadian grown marijuana being lowered by sling from helicopters into a drop site in the Okanogan National Forest. In another sequence, the surveillance video shows a helicopter with suspected bundles of marijuana lashed to its skids landing at a different location in the Okanogan National Forest. When the helicopter touches down, a waiting driver is seen transferring the bundles into a nearby pickup truck.

"The criminals involved in this scheme literally took cross-border smuggling to new heights," said ICE Assistant Secretary Myers. "This sophisticated illegal operation underscores the importance of addressing border security comprehensively. We must look not only at the borders themselves, but also at the interior, and at the modes and methods used by criminals who attempt to do us harm."

During the course of Operation Frozen Timber, U.S. and Canadian enforcement teams intercepted more than 17 drug loads, including one shipment in February 2005 involving five suitcases packed with 149 kilograms of cocaine that constituted the largest single cocaine seizure in the state of Washington last year. Authorities say the defendants planned to use a helicopter to smuggle the cocaine from a landing site in the Okanogan National Forest to British Columbia. Another significant seizure in the case came in September 2005, when agents followed two courier vehicles to a Puyallup residence and recovered more than 1,100 pounds of marijuana.

"Operation Frozen Timber is a great example of an integrated and coordinated international law enforcement effort," said CBP Assistant Commissioner Michael C. Kostelnik. "Both CBP and RCMP air assets played a critical role in supporting this investigation and provided us an opportunity to introduce new technologies and tactics."

The most recent interdiction occurred early last month after CBP air assets, acting on a tip from the RCMP, tracked a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter to a landing site in a state wildlife area in Okanogan County. After watching the cargo being transferred to a waiting pick up truck, ICE agents, along with officers from the U.S. Forest Service and the Okanogan Drug Task Force, stopped the vehicle, arresting two men inside and recovering 329 pounds of marijuana. When the helicopter arrived back in British Columbia, the RCMP arrested the two Canadian pilots, Daryl Desjardins, 45, and Dustin Haugen, 24. Desjardins and Haugen are presently charged in Canada with Import/Export of a Controlled Substance, Trafficking in a Controlled Substance, and Possession of Firearms Contrary to Order.

"The smuggling activity involving National Forest lands poses a threat to the safety of the public and our employees," said Thomas J. Lyons, special agent in charge for the Pacific Northwest Division of the U.S. Forest Service. "I am most appreciative of the exemplary cooperative efforts and look forward to continued success in combating this drug activity."

Intelligence gathered during Operation Frozen Timber revealed there were several independent aerial smuggling cells that essentially subcontracted their services to other criminal organizations

seeking to ferry drugs between the two countries. Investigators believe a number of the defendants in the case provided smuggling services to multiple criminal organizations.

“Make no mistake; these criminal organizations pose a threat to our safe homes and communities. Pilots were flying unsafe aircraft often at dangerously low altitudes,” stated RCMP Chief Superintendent Mercer. “The violent nature of the organized crime groups and the high powered weapons they were in possession of posed a direct threat to the citizens of Canada and the United States.”

Authorities say the public safety concerns associated with the smuggling scheme extend beyond the implications for border security. Several of the Canadian pilots linked to the plot were not licensed to fly in the United States or Canada. In the last 13 months, at least two helicopters allegedly linked to the network have crashed, resulting in three deaths. In March 2005, one of the pilots arrested in connection with Operation Frozen Timber, Dustin Haugen, was involved in the crash of a Canadian registered helicopter at a residence in Abbotsford, British Columbia, killing a woman at the scene. In September 2005, Canadian Ove Jensen and Richard Long were killed when a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter crashed in Hope, British Columbia after returning from a suspected smuggling flight to the United States.

Operation Frozen Timber was conducted under the auspices of the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET), a multi-agency law enforcement team comprised of representatives from Canadian and U.S. law enforcement agencies. Members of the IBETs work together with local, state, and provincial enforcement agencies to target cross-border criminal activity, including investigations involving national security and organized crime.

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